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ABSTRACT

This report arose from discussions among directors of interdisciplinary humanities centers who recognize disparity between what they believe is the popular view of the humanities and their perception of the significant work that their centers sponsor. The question of specialization in the humanities requires attention since it is so often criticized as evidence of a loss of concern with the larger cultural issues and of reduced attention to the needs of the undergraduate learner. But to identify specialization of research as the problem is to misunderstand the situation. First, research must be specialized. Second, to be specialized does not necessarily mean to be trivial. And third, forces within the humanities, such as interdisciplinary humanities centers, already work against narrow specialization. It is imperative that critics of the humanities' failure to construct a core curriculum recognize that every inclusion constitutes a choice, an exclusion, and that those choices reflect local, institutional, and contemporaneous idealogical viewpoints. The number of majors at any given time does not tell a great deal about the internal intellectual and moral state of the humanities. It is likely, however, that humanities enrollments will be stronger in times of prosperity because humanities majors tend not to be seen as pathways to lucrative employment. Of all the recent developments in the humanities, the one that answers negative criticism most directly and most fully expresses the range and importance of the humanities is the proliferation of interdisciplinary humanities centers. (PPB)

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SPEAKING FOR THE HUMANITIES

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Jonathan Culler
Marjorie Garber
E. Ann Kaplan
Catharine R. Stimpson

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Speaking for the Humanities

George Levine

Professor of English, and Director, Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture, Rutgers University

Peter Brooks

Professor of French and Comparative Literature, and Director, Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University

Jonathan Culler

Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and Director, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University

Marjorie Garber

Professor of English, and Director, Center for Literary and Cultural Studies, Harvard University

E. Ann Kaplan

Professor of English, and Director, The Humanities Institute, State University of New York, Stony Brook

Catharine R. Stimpson

Professor of English, and Dean of the Graduate School, Rutgers University

American Council of Learned Societies

ACLS OCCASIONAL PAPER, No. 7

Early in the winter of 1988 Professor E. Ann Kaplan, Director of the Humanities Institute at SUNY-Stony Brook, approached ACLS about hosting a small meeting of other center directors from institutions within easy travelling distance of New York. ACLS staff members were enthusiastic about hosting such a meeting since they shared Kaplan's feeling that although interdisciplinary humanities centers were proliferating rapidly, communication among them was not keeping pace. More than that, the centers and their directors had both interests and problems in common and, like ACLS itself, were much concerned with the future of funding and support for humanities research and education. Accordingly, Kaplan developed a list of some thirty centers and invited their directors to a meeting at the ACLS offices.

A group of approximately twenty people, including center directors and several members of the ACLS staff, gathered for an exploratory meeting on May 6, 1988. In addition to providing an opportunity for the participants to discuss their common concerns, the meeting also crystallized for several members of the group a general feeling that the humanities were being attacked unfairly and that only individual voices were being raised in defense of disciplines that all agreed were actually in remarkably healthy condition. No group was speaking for the humanities, although many individuals were speaking against them. Several of the participants voiced the determination to do something about this lack of a public voice supporting the humanities, and they returned to the ACLS offices to meet again early in the summer.

This pamphlet is the result of that second meeting. It reflects the views of all the authors and the energetic editorial skills of one of them, Professor George Levine of Rutgers University, who coordinated the writing of the various sections and oversaw the distribution of drafts to the several authors for comment. Although ACLS staff members took no direct role in the writing of the essay, it was agreed that ACLS might reach a larger audience than any one of the centers would individually. Accordingly, the costs of producing this pamphlet have been shared equally by the centers directed by its authors and by ACLS.

Like the other essays in this series, "Speaking for the Humanities"

offers the opinions of its authors rather than any "official" view of ACLS. The officers and Board of Directors of ACLS believe, however, that the issues raised here are of paramount importance to the future health of the scholarly activities which it is the Council's most important function to represent. We are pleased to present this essay as the seventh of the ACLS Occasional Papers.

* * * *

This report has been made possible in part through the assistance of humanities faculty and administrators who have provided information for it. The following have also read the report and endorse its position and its findings:

Professor Paul Alpers	*University of California, Berkeley*
Professor W. Bliss Carnochan	*Stanford University*
Professor Ralph Cohen	*University of Virginia*
Professor Peter J. Copek	*Oregon State University*
Professor Jules Chametzky	*University of Massachusetts*
Professor Norman Council	*University of Utah*
Professor Michael Hoffman	*University of California, Davis*
Professor Murray Krieger	*University of California, Irvine*
Professor Dominick LaCapra	*Cornell University*
Professor Gerald J. Larson	*University of California, Santa Barbara*
Professor David Laurence	*Modern Language Association of America*
Professor Richard L. McCormick	*Rutgers University*
Professor Ellen Messer-Davidow	*University of Minnesota*
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Professor A. Richard Turner	*New York University*
Professor Ruel Tyson, Jr	*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*
Professor Richard T. Vann	*Wesleyan University*
Professor James Winn	*University of Michigan*

At this moment of public contention about the humanities, and in this year, the 100th anniversary of the death of Matthew Arnold—the great Victorian spokesman for humanities and culture—it is particularly appropriate to pause to reflect on the state of the humanities. It is of the first importance that recent attacks on the humanities be considered as openly and candidly as possible, for those attacks have practical consequences that will affect the future development, not only of the humanities, but of society as well. Even where they are widest of the mark, the attacks clearly respond to a widespread and understandable popular disenchantment with the work of universities. As professors of the humanities and directors of interdisciplinary humanities centers, we undertake this report, then, with an interest in revising the popular understanding of the humanities and in confronting negative criticism directly.

The report grows out of discussions among center directors who have felt with particular urgency the disparity between the popular indictment of the humanities and the energy and significance of work of the sort their centers sponsor. As directors, we are inevitably concerned with the role of the humanities in contemporary society and discourse, and we share a strong sense of the importance of encouraging and developing many of those movements within the humanities that have recently been regarded with so much alarm. The humanities speak with many voices. This report speaks *for* the humanities—as representative of some of those voices; it speaks *for* them also as advocate.

We are, in fact, living through a revival of the humanities on campuses where until recently the focus of students was overwhelmingly on business and technological studies. Students, both graduate and undergraduate, evidently feel that exciting things are taking place in the humanities, in the self-consciously innovative sectors as well as in traditional departments. The story of the abandonment of the humanities by undergraduates and by the most interesting graduates needs to be rethought, partly in the light of recent evidence of renewed interest in the humanities on campuses across the nation. A serious report on the humanities must treat weaknesses, but it must also lay out as lucidly and succinctly as possible what the humanities have been doing and why. Recently, the Colloquium on the Humanities and the American People has dealt admirably with issues concerning

the humanities and public life in its report, *The Humanities and the American Promise*. The present report, however, will speak to the condition of the humanities in higher education, and it will do so from the perspective of professors of the humanities and directors of humanities centers who have read the critiques in the light of their own experience within major universities.

THE CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF THE HUMANITIES

It is fashionable to denigrate the humanities disciplines, to charge them with considerable responsibility for a perceived breakdown in traditional moral and social values, and to regard them as in a perhaps fatal crisis. The humanities, we have been hearing from former Secretary of Education William Bennett, from Allan Bloom, from the popular press, and from some quite serious journals and books, are suffering from a failure of confidence, of coherence, and particularly of nerve to defend and disseminate the great traditions of philosophy, literature, and the arts. Lynne Cheney's "Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People," *Humanities in America*, is only the latest, but perhaps the most politically significant of these attacks. United States society, with a tradition of anti-intellectualism and interest in science, engineering, economics, has been finding it convenient to indict the humanities for their intellectual weaknesses in attempting to engage practical moral and social issues; they have, so the charge goes, lapsed from the Arnoldian ideals of seeing the object as it really is and of learning the best that has been thought and said. Instead, they allegedly pander to new interest groups and mix the universal ideals of art and morality with history, politics, gender, and race. Thus, alarming changes that are surely primarily connected to national and international restructuring of political and economic power are partly attributed to the failure of the humanities to think unmixedly and speak unequivocally for the universal values in the Western traditions of art, literature, and philosophy.

Allan Bloom's disturbingly popular *The Closing of the American Mind* seems, for example, to attribute major moral and social changes in America to the failure of the humanities to insist on and teach the great philosophical tradition from Plato through Rousseau. Neither Bloom nor any of the other major denigrators of the condition of the

humanities disciplines in higher education attends to the possibility that changes in curriculum as well as changes in the social and moral structure of our society might reflect America's changing position in the world economic community or the emergence of non-Western powers on the world scene.

These attacks would be comic in their incongruity if they were not taken so seriously by so many people, with such potentially dangerous consequences. Such attacks mislead the public, give students quite the wrong impression about what the humanities are doing, and in their vague insistence on the importance of the humanities to the state of the nation actually obfuscate the ways in which the humanities can be and are socially and intellectually important.

To many who have devoted their lives to work in the humanities the indictment seems peculiarly off the mark. It is not that the humanities are cheerily unaware of major problems: the question of what to teach remains a critical and still unresolved one, as does the problem of the varied backgrounds and academic preparations of our students. But such difficulties are not new, and they well predate the decade of the 1960's, when, according to recent detractors, higher education lapsed from its austere and classical standards. It is, then, particularly ironic that the humanities are receiving their most severe criticism at a moment when for many of us their significance and strength have never been greater.

In fact, precisely those things now identified as failings in the humanities actually indicate enlivening transformations. The characteristic approach of the humanities has always been to ask questions. At present, teachers of the humanities are asking questions about everything: about the "canon," about the great ideas of the West, about curriculum, about the structure and possibilities of language itself, about the organization of knowledge, and about the hierarchies that govern our intellectual and political lives. Question asking is inevitably uncomfortable, and satisfactory answers, as the great traditions of the humanities from Plato forward have vitally demonstrated, are difficult to come by and usually prove to be transitory. Teachers of the humanities tend to encourage that discomfort and find it a source of creativity: it could not have been easy to sit at Socrates' feet.

Indeed, while American universities once took a back seat to

European universities with a tradition of strength in the humanities — Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Bologna, Berlin—this is no longer the case. Our best institutions are as strong in the humanities as the best institutions in the world. And the American system is the envy of other nations, for its contribution to scholarship and research and the liveliness of its educational and intellectual activities.

Still, no sector of the population is more disturbed than teachers of the humanities about signs of "cultural illiteracy" and even literal illiteracy among students. It is, after all, in the interest of humanities teachers that more people care more about art, philosophy, literature, and history. And no group of people is more likely than humanities teachers to be critical of what goes on in the humanities—indeed, most of the anecdotal material used against the humanities is provided by humanities professors themselves. It is the humanities scholars' self-consciousness about their own achievements and methods that leads many critics to imagine that the humanities are in crisis when, in fact, that self-consciousness is one of the signs of their health. Plato notoriously began a radical criticism of the humanities in one of those texts—*The Republic*—routinely taken as essential to our understanding of the West.

The problems are almost always more complicated than the popular interpretation allows. Often the difficulties stigmatized in recent indictments are the consequence of the virtues of the system. So, for example, the fact that universities sometimes cannot insure that all students study with the most accomplished teachers is not a consequence of bad faith, or professional self-interest, as is often charged, but of the sheer size and cost of the enterprise of higher education in America. That is, it is a consequence of the attempt to create a genuinely democratic system of higher education.

To those now working in the humanities, the situation of the humanities requires a different diagnosis and set of solutions from the ones gaining currency in certain areas of the press. Some of the charges demarcate areas of continual discussion and contention. All tend to overlook those aspects of the humanities that have been attempting to respond creatively and responsibly to the evolution of basic research and to contemporary social and cultural change. They badly underestimate the role the humanities play within the university, at undergraduate and graduate levels. And they assume that the

conditions of decline in enrollment in the early 1970's had more to do with intellectual than with economic changes in the country. The evidence, we will show, is that the humanities make a very strong presence in contemporary higher education, that for the most part enrollments are increasing, and that universities are prepared to invest considerably more in the humanities than they were when the economy was in decline and a very artificial demand for economics and business courses skewed enrollments almost everywhere. In the sections that follow, we address the charges against the humanities in higher education that are most frequently promulgated by critics like Bennett, Bloom, and Cheney.

SPECIALIZATION

The question of specialization requires detailed attention since it figures so prominently as evidence of a loss of concern with the big issues of our culture and of our falling away from the undergraduate learner. But this critique is badly off the mark. We agree that there has probably been increased specialization and professionalization in the humanities. We agree that many of our professional journals, like those in other fields, are often unintelligible to those outside academia. The development of a "jargon" would seem one of the inescapable symptoms of specialization, and at its pretentious worst that jargon deserves all the caricaturing and attack the humanities themselves have attracted these days.[1]

But the usual critiques of specialization are beside the point. We do not expect physicists to work within their disciplines only in language that non-physicists might comprehend, although we do expect the ideas of specialists to be made available to the lay reader. Physicists speak to a popular culture only when they are not doing the scientific work that makes a difference in their fields. We are interested in what they say because they have made a difference, through their intense specializations, in the way we live now. The recommendation in *Humanities in America* that "to counter the excess of specialization . . . those who fund, publish, and evaluate research should encourage work of general significance," ignores the fact that general significance only develops from specialized and particularized research.

If it is the case that the great humanist traditions of the West are

important, then why should it be so problematic that professors of the humanities should want to study those traditions intensely, with as rich a recognition of the complications and nuances in the construction of ideas, art, history, as they might possibly achieve? And as teachers, might we not expect of them that they attempt to translate their developed understandings into language that might touch their students, make *them* understand what is at stake? It is precisely because teachers of the humanities take their subject seriously that they become specialists, allow themselves to be professionals rather than amateurs —belle lettrists who unselfconsciously sustain traditional hierarchies, traditional social and cultural exclusions, assuming that their audience is both universal and homogeneous.

No matter how broad their knowledge and interests, teachers of the humanities are almost invariably also specialists in one or more areas of knowledge, symbolic logic, or seventeenth century Spanish poetry, or the history of Greece in the sixth century B.C. In other fields, in business and industry, for instance, we expect and value specialization that enables people to cope with the problems they encounter in their jobs.

In the universities, as in all the other institutions of our society, there is a range of performance in research and teaching. All research is not excellent, nor does good research necessarily produce good teaching, although there can be no good teaching without good research. But to think that in the humanities specialization of research is the problem is to misunderstand the situation. We would make three points.

1) First, research must be specialized. Since it consists of learning more than is already known about a topic, it must focus its efforts specifically and intensely, in uncommon fashion, to make progress. To delve more deeply or examine more closely than hitherto is, indeed, the intellectual function of the university.

2) But to be specialized is not to be trivial. The better, the more successful a piece of specialized research, the more likely that it will have significant implications. What may seem obscure and narrow to one not versed in a field may be crucial: the study of the inherited characteristics of fruitflies sounds like an amazingly specialized and pointless subject, until one knows that such studies shed light on fundamental genetic mechanisms. In general, one cannot tell what is

specialized and what is not from a mere description of the topic. The study of Balinese cockfighting sounds exceedingly recondite, but Clifford Geertz's work on this subject is now a famous piece of ethnography, a central example in the debates about the understanding of another culture and the interpretation of ways not our own. Or, what could seem a more narrow historical project than Natalie Zemon Davis's work on the life story of a particular French peasant of the sixteenth century, but *The Return of Martin Guerre* turns out to speak to many people of issues which they find of compelling interest. Of course, not every piece of research proves interesting to a large group of scholars, but one cannot easily determine in advance which projects are going to prove particularly important, any more than scientists can restrict research to those experiments that will have revolutionary significance. If we knew the significance of research projects, we would not have to conduct the research at all.

3) Forces within the humanities already work against narrow specialization. The proliferation of humanities centers on university campuses in recent years is one sign of a desire on the part of scholars to communicate with colleagues in other fields, to exchange results of thinking within particular disciplines, and to break down disciplinary boundaries in their research. Far from revering narrow specialists, teachers of the humanities particularly value the work of thinkers in other fields who succeed in speaking to them across fields. Geertz and Claude Lévi-Strauss are read by people outside anthropology; Michel Foucault has taught much to people not specialists in the history of ideas; Julia Kristeva speaks to audiences well outside the realm of semiotics; Stanley Cavell, a philosopher who also writes about American literature, Hollywood cinema, and Shakespeare, represents the very antithesis of the specialization for which scholars in the humanities have been criticized.

What is needed is not a campaign against specialized research but rather increasing opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary discussion, so that research will not be assessed only in some narrow disciplinary way. Scholarly communities are in the midst of developing contexts where faculty and graduate students from different specialties can exchange ideas and then develop the larger implications of their research.

Thought in the humanities, as elsewhere, becomes truly valuable

and interesting only as it tests limits: the goal is the most advanced, most self-reflective, most rigorous, most subtle work possible. Even if we cannot live by or live up to the most demanding forms of thought but must retreat to compromises, we must not advance a rationale for the humanities that turns from its frontiers, from the furthest reaches of lines of thought. Since recent reports on education make the specialization or professionalization of humanistic disciplines the scapegoats for a general cultural situation, we must assert the value not just of specialization but of professionalization also. For professionalization makes thought possible by developing sets of questions, imposing norms which have then to be questioned and thereby promoting debate on key problems. Thought can flourish under utilitarian pressures, but it must be free to pursue questions as far as possible without knowing what general use or relevance the answers might prove to have.

But this defense of specialization and professionalization must be accompanied by the recognition that texts do not belong to particular disciplines or departments. There should be no monopolies in the humanities. The objects that interest us are in general accessible to a non-specialized public, which is frequently also ourselves, as we move from one field to another: literary critics look at paintings or read history or philosophy, and philosophers or art critics study literary works. Cross-disciplinary work provides critical corrections of the assumptions of disciplines and generates new insights, as well as errors that can lead specialists to rethink what needs to be said to prevent them.

One might, therefore, call for unconstrained specialization on the one hand, and cross-disciplinary activity on the other. What such a vision of the humanities does not call for and thus implicitly combats is the middle ground of disciplines governed by a gentlemanly ideal: a vision of the humanities as repository of known truths and received values, which a non-professional corps of collectors present to the young. The humanities are better conceived as fields of exploration and critique rather than materials for transmission. If such a view promotes a divided and contentious future it is, we believe, an engaging and productive one.

IDEOLOGY AND OBJECTIVITY

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of modern thought, even for many humanities professors and certainly for society at large, is its challenge to the positivist ideal of objectivity and disinterest. For that ideal is at the root of modern Western thought; it has been essential to the development of science, the West's most distinctive intellectual contribution to world culture. Many of those who attack the humanities disciplines mistakenly believe that ideal also to be at the heart of the principles that underlie democracy—the belief that members of a society can act against their own self-interest, recognizing a larger social good. For many, the ideal of objectivity and disinterest, which would seem to be concerned primarily with knowledge, is an issue of profound moral significance.

A distinguished philosopher of science, Rom Harré, makes a case for scientific realism that can help explain why so many critics of humanities disciplines are frightened by contemporary critiques of the positivist ideal. He argues that science is a moral exemplar, "a model or ideal of rational cooperation set within a strict moral order." Although Harré is aware that within the scientific community there are many instances of greed and self-interest, he insists that science as an institution is rational and disinterested. And the ideal of research and knowledge that Harré espouses is only a sharply defined version of what is commonly perceived to be the way *all* research is (or should be) conducted, all knowledge is (or should be) accumulated.

Consequently, the belief that all thought inevitably derives from particular standpoints, perspectives, and interests would seem to subvert the moral order. Many who are distrustful of the modern critique of objectivity and disinterest assume that it gives license to anything since there would appear to be on this account no objective grounds of argument, only various versions of personal or political interest. This is not the place to enter into an extensive discussion of the philosophical positions that have been taken up around this problem. But the problem exists, and even for science itself as it is understood by some of the most distinguished philosophers of science of our time. And the fact that it exists is evidence of the authenticity of the intellectual and moral problems with which the humanities are grappling and for which they are often blamed. The apparently

abstruse and professionalized theories with which the humanities disciplines work these days are often attempts to confront this problem. And the consensus of most of the dominant theories is that all thought does, indeed, develop from particular standpoints, perspectives, interests.

But there need be nothing frightening about this conclusion. Only an established authority that denies the possibility of practical and rational choice if it is challenged has to fear such a recognition. Surely, democracy, of all political systems, has the least to fear in this respect. A system of thought that is alert to the way interests generate thought and ideological assumptions govern the most self-evident truth has a better chance to understand and analyze arguments effectively than a system that does not question assumptions.

To locate ideology is not necessarily to condemn. In America, for instance, everyone would be likely to agree that we want our students to learn "to appreciate democracy," and we design our curricula with this objective. So we teach in ways that other countries, with other objectives, would not. We may wish to argue that a commitment to democracy is *not* ideological but a recognition of a universal truth, disinterestedly achieved, and unavailable to other more partisan cultures. This, ironically, makes the non-authoritarian democratic system entirely dependent on an asserted authority. We ought to be—and we are—able to defend our ideological commitments without recourse to such arguments. A firm recognition of our own interests, and of the fact that in teaching democratic principles we are being ideological strengthens rather than weakens our position and our capacity to learn and teach.

We should not equate truth with our own political ideology. Even within that ideology there is likely to be further questioning by different groups with very different understandings of democracy. All parties believe that the truth is on their ideological side. "Objectivity" and "disinterest" are often the means by which the equation of truth and particular ideological positions can be disguised, even from those who unequivocally believe in the possibility of objectivity and disinterest.

One need not make an absolute commitment to the view that no thought can be "uncontaminated" by interests in order to see how intellectually fruitful that view can be. Allowing for the possibility of

one's own interests, one can look for irrational elements in otherwise rational arguments, or for disguised ideological assumptions. Similarly, one might find that it deepens one's understanding of philosophy, art, and literature when one recognizes how even their minutest details can reflect the social and political structures dominant at the time they were created.

But critics of the state of the humanities today charge that an interest in theory, and in the claims of feminist, Afro-American, and Third World studies, for example, has produced thinking that is ideologically grounded, to the detriment of their own kind of objective and disinterested study. This charge fails to recognize once again that traditional claims to disinterest, to the humanities as the realm of "sweetness and light," reflected unacknowledged ideologies. The current debate about the humanities can itself be seen as emerging from an ideological context since one of the results of the contemporary interest in theory and the critique of the foundations of knowledge in many disciplines has been the realization that all stances in scholarly research, as in the choice of values, imply a prior commitment to some basic belief system. The best contemporary work in the humanities strives to make clear both its critique of the ideologies of previous work, and its own inevitable ideological blindspots. At its best, contemporary humanistic thinking does not peddle ideology, but rather attempts to sensitize us to the presence of ideology in our work, and to its capacity to delude us into promoting as universal values that in fact belong to one nation, one social class, one sect.

Humanities in America contends that scholarly emphasis on politics, gender, race, and class does not bring students to an understanding of how Milton or Shakespeare speaks to the deepest concerns we all have as human beings. But it is not today's college professors and academic scholars who politicize the major writers of the Western tradition; those writers were themselves working, often very consciously, within the political sphere, upon which they depended for their livelihood—and for their subject matter, whether directly or allegorically presented. When a text is read in the context of history, it is most likely to engage students in the questions of value and morality that many lament are now missing from humanities studies.

When viewed historically texts are most fully humanized, and the strangenesses in them become accessible in new ways. Surely this is true for *Macbeth*, written by Shakespeare when his company was under the protection of King James I, formerly James IV of Scotland, a king who had written extensively about both tyranny and witchcraft. Similarly, the treatment of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* becomes more, not less significant, if one understands the political and social situation of Jews in early modern Europe, and especially in England, from which they had been banned for three centuries, since the reign of Edward I. Or again, *The Tempest* becomes even more powerful and complex when read in the context of the colonial expeditions in which native populations (like Caliban, who "once was mine own king" before the Europeans came) were enslaved and, often, tortured and killed. To take a final example, the famous passage in *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton distinguishes between Adam and Eve by saying "hee for God only, she for God in him" should obviously not be passively accepted as authoritative and "timeless," but needs to be read as the articulation of his own culture's view, as part of a history with which we still contend.

Far from constituting an abandonment of the humanistic concern with values, the best work characteristic of the humanities today has renewed debates on value, indeed on the ethics of what we study and how we study it. And it is evident that, in the wake of the debates carried on within the humanistic disciplines over the past two decades, the humanities are once again attracting many of our most talented students, who are aware that the arguments over the "canon," context, and interpretive method reflect issues of central concern to definitions of what it means to be human. There is no reason why the humanities cannot continue to foster knowledge of the great traditions of the past —of its books and artifacts and the values they embody—while simultaneously pursuing an inquiry into how we understand what we read and observe.

METHOD AND SUBSTANCE

The charge that scholars in the humanities have been overly concerned with theory and methodology to the neglect of humanistic "content," and interested in specialized knowledge to the detriment of

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shared values—often enshrined in a core curriculum—has a nostalgic appeal, but it misses the point of what has been happening in intellectual life in general and in universities in particular. The charge assumes a false opposition between method and value, an opposition that has been most clearly exposed by theoretical developments within the humanities.

Over the past two decades, traditional assumptions about ways of studying the humanities have been contested, in large measure because a number of related disciplines—cultural anthropology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, the philosophy of language—were undergoing major changes that inevitably forced humanists to ask basic questions about their methods and the very definition of their fields. It is significant that scholars from other fields now look to the humanities for productive models of understanding, and students have returned to courses in the humanities in the search for theories and methods of central cultural importance. Theory has been the pre-condition of the re-emergence of the humanities.

The humanities today constitute an area of research and thought tested in debate, and clearly pertinent to the large issues that confront anyone interested in the issues that the humanities have been blamed for abandoning. The crisis of belief in shared values and a core curriculum does not reflect a flight of the faculty into specialization and career enhancement. It is an authentic crisis, and one that can be ignored only at the peril of genuine intellectual life and of the future of the culture itself.

The challenge to claims of intellectual authority alluded to in the introduction to this report issues from almost all areas of modern thought—science, psychology, feminism, linguistics, semiotics, and anthropology. One cannot say that it is simply a question of which books, concepts, and values one studies and teaches. Modern thought has—or ought to have—made us uncertain about the boundaries and limits of knowledge, about where we stand when we claim to speak with authority. Uncertainty has often been taken by current critics of the humanities as an indication of the humanities' "failure of nerve." But to live with uncertainty is one of the conditions of great art, and admission that difficulties are great enough to require new reflection on our condition is hardly indicative of moral cowardice. From the perspective of many of the best practitioners of modern thought, it is

precisely the unwillingness to live with uncertainty, the desperate need to return to old verities that seems the real failure of nerve. Our thinking has been unsettled for genuine and compelling reasons, and the search for theoretical constructs and expert knowledge has been a necessary response.

The humanities have always given a central place to the study of written texts and created artifacts in which men and women have sought to reflect upon, to reformulate, and to provide new aspirations for the human condition. Hence the humanities have always given, and should continue to give, major—though not exclusive—attention to those works that reflect a culture's most enduring values, its most memorable uses of language and image. But of necessity, the humanities have also studied the skills of reading and interpretation, including their changes over time. They have worked toward an understanding not of the great books alone, but also of the conditions that define "greatness," of how readers and societies define the creation of meaning and significance.

As regards "great books," the challenge to the humanities today is not—as the critics would have it—how to blaze a trail back to shared values and traditional humanistic content, but rather how to create new contexts, in research and teaching, that will allow the best contemporary thinking, including theory, to be reinvested in the teaching of classic texts in the most productive way. The competence of the best scholars in the humanities today is remarkable. Rather than deploring their specialization, we need to find ways to make their work available in the curriculum. Students need both to read the "great books" and to learn to think about them in ways that do not suppress the challenges of contemporary modes of analysis.

The original "humanists" of the European tradition—the humanists of the Renaissance—were engaged in a similar enterprise, unearthing the past of classical antiquity in a search to know it for itself and for what it could mean to the present. The enduring works of the Renaissance humanists are not the slavish reproductions of Greek and Latin works that they sometimes produced, but rather their "imitations" in an innovative spirit: their attempts to rework the lessons of the past masters in new vernacular languages for a new audience in new socio-historical contexts, in a situation of changed beliefs.

Innovation and tradition together are needed if the past is to be made a living force within the present.

CORE CURRICULUM

As we have suggested, the image of professors of the humanities working in their narrow specialties with no concern for the large questions of curriculum has little to do with the actual life of our campuses. The intellectual ferment which has produced such fundamental reconsiderations of aesthetic, moral, and intellectual traditions has had a direct effect on the quantity and the nature of debates and battles about curriculum. Disagreement, once again, is often taken as evidence of incoherence and self-doubt. The great traditions of the humanities have been traditions of disagreement, of large scale intellectual combat over fundamental issues of value—the eighteenth-century "battle of the books," for example, the Puritan attack on the theater in the name of a greater text, the combat between vernacular and classic languages, Christian or Pagan mythology, realism and romance, culture and anarchy, poetry or the state, Aristotelian or "New" criticism. The history of criticism is a history of contention; the life of the humanities depends upon such contention.

Nowhere does the vigor and pertinence of contemporary discussion in the humanities display itself more practically than in the debates about core curricula. Such debates are not new in the history of the humanities, but can be traced back at least to the articulation of the seven liberal arts in the trivium and the quadrivium. The model in most American education before the 1970's was that of the distribution requirement, in which students were asked to choose courses from different areas—science, social science, humanities—to fulfill their non-major requirements. That model gave way, though not entirely and perhaps not in the majority of cases, to a model that gave students a freer range of choices. None of these models has proved fully satisfactory, and most institutions are now engaged in serious discussions of the content and rationale of basic courses, especially in the humanities.

Although public figures sometimes suggest that these issues are simple—that all would be well if every student were required to study certain specified and classic books—the difficulties in making

definitive decisions suggest otherwise, even among those majority of humanities teachers who lament that their students do not have an adequate shared background of learning. The crisis, as we have said, is authentic and requires not retreats to traditions which in their own time were inadequate, but rethinking. What is to be the relationship between works traditionally taught as great—the vast majority of them by Western white males—and writing reflecting the experience and aspirations of other groups, either within Western societies or from other societies?

Developments in modern thought, as we have already suggested, have made us alert to what is left out when "the best that has been thought and written" is selected or when discussion focuses on "man." We have learned to ask whether universalist claims do not in fact promote as a norm the concerns of a particular group and set aside as partial or limited those of other groups. Characteristically in literary studies, for instance, a boy's experience of growing up has been deemed universal and a girl's marginal. Expansion of what is taught is one solution. "The central function of imaginative literature," writes William Empson, "is to make you realize that other people act on moral convictions different from your own." A particular virtue of literature, of history, of anthropology, is instruction in otherness: vivid, compelling evidence of differences in cultures, mores, assumptions, values. At their best, these subjects make otherness palpable and make it comprehensible without reducing it to an inferior version of the same, as a universalizing humanism threatens to do. The dramatization of social and cultural pluralism is one of the major roles of humanistic study. One may ask how racial tensions on campuses or in American society might be affected if students and citizens had empathetically grasped the experience of others, as literature and history can convey it.

There are, however, difficult issues here that require continuing debate: should one, in the interests of the representation of otherness, seek to include a "representative" sampling of works from non-Western traditions and of minority traditions within Western culture? Are we, in fact, aiming at a multi-racial international canon? The very possibility of a "canon" under these circumstances becomes questionable. Should we not insist, rather, on the necessity of reading works in relation to other works of their traditions and thus resist the idea of a

more comprehensive canon, countering it with a series of deeper, more locally-accurate studies? When dealing with American materials, to what extent should the humanities advance awareness of cultural difference by promoting the notion of American culture as an arena of competing, marginalized, suppressed interests, situations, traditions, rather than as a common possession?

Grappling with such problems is one of the major tasks of the humanities; here the concerns of teaching and research intersect, for it is research that has brought forward the materials whose place we are now debating, and it is research—reflection on the nature of cultures and their histories—that will suggest solutions. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s rediscovery of Harriet Wilson's 1859 *Our Nig* has helped reframe the whole history of black literature in the United States, and thus of the American novel itself. Similarly, feminist studies of traditional narratives—as for example Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*—have significantly reshaped the way readers might think about the nineteenth-century novel. Critical analysis of "non-literary" writings—of such writers, for example, as Darwin and Freud, of Wollstonecraft and Descartes, of Saussure and Kristeva—has entailed reshaping not only critical theory but the syllabi of our usual historical surveys.

Likewise, popular culture, instead of being excoriated as the cause of the degeneration of youth might be made part of contemporary education—as, at some few schools, it already has been. The study of the history of, and competing theories about, popular culture provides students with a framework in which to criticize the materials they consume daily and unthinkingly. In such studies, students are given the opportunity to reflect on what has been lost and gained in the changes they find in such areas as the quality of interpersonal relations, in the relationship of the individual to the law, in sexism and racism, as well as in the terrain of the aesthetic—the poetic and expressive uses of language, the concern with beauty, shape, composition. In our pluralistic academy, many different programs will be tried, with results that humanists will have to evaluate.

As Gerald Graff has recently shown in *Professing Literature*, one of the continuing weaknesses of the discipline of "literature" through all its changes over the course of more than a century has been its failure to take as a subject what is most strikingly interesting about the

discipline: its continuing debates about how to read and what to read. One very plausible solution to the difficulties of pluralism and of the persistent self-reflexiveness of the humanities is to attempt to teach the problem of how and why humanities curricula are constituted, of why they are pluralist rather than uniform. With the problem as focus it would make much sense to teach a traditional canon but at the same time to examine the factors that have produced the canon and critiques of it, to see what happens when "the" canon (and we have no illusions that it is in fact monolithic) is observed from the perspective of the social, historical, and ideological contexts which have produced it.

To encourage this debate is not to suggest that "everything is subjective." Critics of the humanities are deeply worried about this "relativism," which they regard as an easy lapsing from the rigors of rationality and hard choice. But that kind of simple reduction is precisely not what the contentions within the humanities imply. Rather, they entail a search for the best means of rational engagement with these hard questions of pluralism, of values, of otherness.

Similarly, to agree to view the subjects we teach from the perspectives of history and ideology is not to cave in to the argument that the humanities have surrendered their objectivity in the interests of mere politics. The dichotomy, to begin with, is spurious since, as we have seen, there has never been a time when the humanities were exempt from history. As the most powerful modern philosophies and theories have been demonstrating, claims of disinterest, objectivity, and universality are not to be trusted and themselves tend to reflect local historical conditions. The insistence on trying to understand the conditions of their own existence, which Graff and other critics have been urging on the humanities, is fully consistent with much in the already established canons.

The professoriate is a remarkably mixed constituency whose tendency is to find matter for disagreement in the most minute intellectual points. Moreover, American colleges and universities suffer from considerable pressure. One of the reasons there is so much activity on matters of teaching and curriculum within universities is that change is so very difficult to effect. From the perspective of one of the most important changes to touch the humanities in recent years—the development of interdisciplinary foci and of interdisciplinary centers of the sort directed by the authors of this report—the problem with the

humanities in higher education is not, as the criticism goes, that they have surrendered to a new and mindless relativism. On the contrary, institutional structures have not changed substantially since before the 1960's. The same criteria for promotion are in place; the same curricula, with the addition of a few courses in "non-traditional" subjects, the same preoccupation with periodization (literature is to be defined as medieval, renaissance, seventeenth century, etc.), the same writers from the same perspectives. Our point is not to criticize these structures generally, merely to indicate that those who lament their passing are mourning an event that has not occurred. The enormous activity of criticism and scholarship is produced by scholars who, in the classroom, still teach their courses in the great writers and the traditionally conceived periods and genres.

All the anecdotes about the breakdown of the standard curricula and courses are barely relevant to the real conditions within most colleges and universities. As a recent unpublished report of MLA for the years 1984–85 shows, "approximately four-fifths of English programs with majors prescribe courses their majors must take [50% between three and six courses]; 16% prescribe 9 or more courses that all majors must take." Among those courses, the most frequently required are survey courses in British literature; about half the departments require an American literature survey. The other most frequently required course is Shakespeare, and after that History of the English Language and then Literary Criticism. Such outré subjects—from the perspective of recent attacks on the humanities—as film and women writers and minority literature have indeed been added to course offerings by about 25% of departments. But they remain, despite much publicity, very much minority courses within the overall curriculum.

Once again, however, it is not mere statistics or raw data that illuminate what is going on in the humanities. Humanities departments have been slow to make structural changes, but there are changes—if not of the kind decried by many critics of the humanities. The evidence of enrollments in recent years suggests that while "minority" courses are indeed growing, debate about a core curriculum and the canon has also been contemporaneous with growth in courses on subjects traditionally viewed as canonical. Courses in American history and Shakespeare are, for example, experiencing higher enrollments.

But one should not assume that courses on new materials are

innovative and courses on traditional materials are conservative. In one sense just the opposite may be true: courses on non-traditional literatures inevitably will seek to make them understandable in traditional terms, while courses on traditional materials may treat them from new angles. Some of the most experimental work in literary criticism, for instance—feminist, psychoanalytic, New Historicist—has focused on Shakespeare, whose works are being debated with unparalleled excitement and vigor. Plato, Rousseau, Kant, and Wordsworth are only four other canonical authors who have been examined in new ways. The entire corpus of Victorian fiction has been subjected to searching theoretical reconsiderations, and history courses often shift their foci from narratives of great political events to social history. The core of extant core curricula may prove to be the place where the toughest questions are being asked and the most challenging and disruptive thinking is taking place.

We may lament the insuperable difficulties of constructing a core of courses that we believe all students should take. And certainly, most of us carry around in the top of our heads a list of famous writers, artists, historical events. Why not simply require knowledge of them and be done with it? The list is too long and too short—too long to allow adequate treatment of all, too short to include members of anyone else's list. It is imperative that critics of the humanities' failure to construct or advocate a core curriculum recognize that every inclusion constitutes a choice, an exclusion. We need to be certain that we understand the grounds on which we are making those choices, allowing those exclusions. And once we try to think the choices through we find ourselves involved in the kinds of fundamental questions about standpoint, cultural difference, aesthetic, moral, and political values that belie universalist claims and assertions of utter disinterest. We do not claim that the effort to make those decisions should not be made, only that they should not be made self-delusively, self-righteously, without recognition of the nature of the contemporary epistemological and ideological debate. How we make such choices might well be the subject of the core course of a core curriculum, for such a course would indeed be a humanist course in values, in history, in language, in the very meaning and significance of cultural literacy.

ENROLLMENT

The charge that the humanities themselves are responsible for the often noted decline in enrollments is incorrect. *To Reclaim a Legacy* begins by asserting that "since 1970 the number of majors in English has declined by 57 percent, in philosophy by 41 percent, in history by 62 percent." But the decline was far from universal. In Rutgers University, to take one example, there was no decline in English majors through the whole period. Nor, as we shall see, was there any such decline in English or the humanities at Wesleyan. Again, at Harvard University, from 1976 to 1986 the number of students majoring in humanities programs actually rose. But the point is not to deny that, nationwide, there was a significant decline in the number of students opting to major in the humanities—though how large and how steady a decline is not so clear. It is, however, important that in many universities the decline did not happen. And the real question about the decline in majors is why it occurred, and with what significance.

To read the decline as evidence of a radical intellectual and pedagogical failure, and one that suddenly set in between 1970 and 1980, requires considerable straining and ignoring of much relevant information. The example of enrollment figures at Stanford University will help clarify why such an argument cannot hold. There the number of humanities majors indisputably fell off drastically enough to invite apocalyptic interpretations. But those figures need to be read in the context of a radical decline in the social sciences and, at the same time, of an extraordinary growth in one of those social sciences — economics.

While there is growing evidence of an important resurgence in the popularity of the humanities in most recent years, our point here is not that the decline in popularity in the 1970's was illusory, but that it has been misinterpreted. There was a remarkable correlation between the growth of economics as a major and the decline of English and history.[2] Nor was there simply a move away from the humanities, since majors in other social science fields declined even more drastically. The argument that the decline in English and history is to be attributed to pedagogical weaknesses, failure of nerve, intellectual incoherence is improbable, given these facts. Is it likely that the quality of teaching and substance in the humanities fell off with stunning rapidity in 1971,

while the quality of teaching in economics rose with parallel speed? Even more startling would be a similar decline in quality of teaching in political science, which in 1969–70 enrolled 10% of all majors, or in all the other social sciences as well, whose enrollments clearly declined while those of economics rose.

We witness in the Stanford statistics one example of a national phenomenon—the explosion of interest in economics and business that ran contemporary with other phenomena unrelated to the internal problems and developments of the humanities. In particular, it is worth noting that the period of the 1970's was a period of declining economic expectations throughout the country, when middle class America began to reimagine the possibility of hard times. There may well be other causes. But the argument that declining enrollment is evidence of a sudden weakness in the quality of teaching in the humanities is an implausible speculation—a result of guess and anecdote—and dependent on the assumption that what goes on outside of universities has no impact on the way students make choices. Enrollments in economics obviously do not betoken some radical improvement in the quality of teaching in that discipline, especially since it—like all others in academia—is subject to the same forces of professionalization that are supposed to have weakened teaching in the humanities.

The number of majors at any given time cannot tell us a great deal about the internal intellectual and moral state of the discipline. It is likely, however, that humanities enrollments will be stronger in times of prosperity because humanities majors tend not to be seen as pathways to lucrative employment. That they are popular when the economic pressure is lighter suggests, however, that they are intrinsically attractive; the positive evidence, that is to say, tends in this case to be stronger than the negative. Our experience suggests that the pool of applicants for advanced degrees in the humanities is considerably stronger that it was a decade ago. Young people who then might have enrolled in law schools are now applying to graduate humanities programs in increasing numbers.

Different stories could undoubtedly be told for different universities, the nature of the university and the population on which it draws having an important effect on choice of majors. If, to take another example, we look at the figures for Wesleyan University, we find that between 1962 and 1987 there was very little fluctuation in the

percentage of students majoring in the various disciplines. The humanities (excluding history and philosophy) enrolled a maximum of 35.9% majors in 1974–75 (a time when at Stanford there was some decline in humanities majors) and a minimum of 32.6% in 1982–83. Even economics experienced only a very small boom to a maximum of 5.8% in 1981–82. The same is true for majors at Yale University. One needs, that is to say, to revise one's understanding of the "weakness" of the humanities insofar as that is argued on the strength of figures about the numbers of majors.

The question is even further complicated because the number of majors does not tell the whole story about the number of enrollments. In its response to *Humanities in America*, the National Humanities Alliance points out that, at least in unsystematic surveys, there is considerable evidence that even when the number of majors is quite small, the number of enrollments, regardless of institutional requirements, often increases steadily. At the University of Delaware—an example used by the Alliance—while majors in philosophy numbered about twenty to forty between 1967 and 1987, enrollments in philosophy courses showed an increase of 300% by 1977, and an additional 75% more by 1987.

In fact, the whole question of declining enrollments seems to us largely beside the point, especially given recent developments. In a 1983–84 MLA survey of English departments, the vast majority of departments reported stable or increased numbers of majors for the period 1980 to 1983. Anecdotal reports since then continue to mention substantial, in some cases dramatic, increases. Whereas the recent *Humanities in America* continues the kind of argument made in *To Reclaim a Legacy*, it ignores even some of the NEH's own statistics, which suggest, as the National Humanities Alliance points out, "that, from 1980 to 1985, enrollments in humanities courses increased." Second, it uses those figures without a thorough statistical analysis that would note differing trends within the twenty year period, 1967–1987; and it fails to place those statistics in the context of a larger period that might help make clear to what extent the base point itself is aberrant. Finally, such statistics cannot by themselves support the interpretation that the content and methods of humanities courses are driving people away.

In an appendix we provide more information about enrollments, particularly in history and at the graduate level. While it has been

gathered unsystematically, from professional association documents and from a number of universities that answered our requests for information, we offer it as an indication of large trends that have yet to be documented adequately.

While the small sampling of data about undergraduate education can only begin to suggest the vitality of the humanities in curricula throughout the country, it is certain that the humanities are anything but moribund and marginal. The increase in majors will begin to show up in the number of undergraduate and graduate degrees in the next few years. Within universities and colleges humanities majors constitute a significant proportion of all majors. But the statistics do little to suggest how vital and important the humanities are to the intellectual life of universities and colleges. At a time when humanities programs in higher education are being accused consistently of decline and loss of appeal and seriousness, the statistical argument for "decline" is demonstrably spurious.

TEACHING

The humanities obviously continue to occupy a place of central importance in undergraduate curricula. Although in 1984–85 only 25% of all institutions had a general education requirement in freshman literature, and 50% required at least one sophomore literature course, the number of students who elected courses in the humanities was vastly larger than the requirements can suggest. As the National Humanities Alliance puts it, "Students enroll in humanities courses even when the courses are not required. Therefore, care must also be taken in ascribing significance to the absence of college and university requirements." Statistics about requirements usually form part of the indictment of the humanities, but these raw facts tell us little about them—certainly very little about teaching. It is obviously in the interest of humanities programs to have their courses serve as general education requirements; it seems absurd, then, to blame humanities faculties for not wanting to teach such courses. Decisions of this kind are made at the college or university level where the humanities' voices are normally outnumbered by other academic and professional interests.

Despite university trends away from the sort of prerequisites that

supported the humanities in earlier years, despite increasing research pressure on faculty, most evidence suggests that professors in the humanities remain close to undergraduates and their academic concerns. In most universities, most scholars in the humanities teach a full load, unless they are doing administrative jobs. While at some universities, it is true, the most distinguished (or, at least, the most sought after) faculty may not have to do much undergraduate teaching, on the whole it is everywhere true that humanities professors at all levels are much closer to undergraduate teaching than their scientific counterparts. At Yale, Harvard, Cornell, and Princeton, for instance, even the most senior and distinguished faculty in the humanities devote at least half their time to teaching undergraduates.

While we agree that it would be better if more of the most celebrated faculty would teach more undergraduates, it is crucial to recognize the complexity and difficulty of the problem without surrendering to the sort of simplistic and pious analysis and recommendations that we can find, among other places, in *To Reclaim a Legacy*. For example, that report repeats a long-standing argument that the "best professors" should teach introductory and lower level courses. Most professors of the humanities that we know would agree with the injunction; and in fact many such courses are taught by outstanding faculty. However, in addition to large lecture courses with celebrated teachers, the humanities require introductory courses with small classes, where all students can participate in class discussion and question the teacher, and where their thinking and writing will receive close attention. Such classes cannot, unfortunately, be taught only by those whose reputations as scholars and performers have marked them as the "best teachers."

Especially at state universities, the number of students involved is far too large to permit direct contact between the most celebrated teachers and all the students registered for humanities courses. State universities cannot even provide enough classes without reaching well beyond their full-time teaching faculty and employing a host of beginning or coadjutant teachers. Thus, agreement about the importance of exposing all students to well-trained and imaginative teachers does not lead to a simple solution. With the best will in the world, full-time faculty could not begin to teach all the courses required, and certainly not if they are also to have a genuine

responsibility to scholarship and to teaching "the best that has been thought and said" in other important courses through the curriculum.

This is to say that as American universities have expanded and managed to approximate genuinely democratic higher education in a way unattempted by any other country in the world, some compromises have been necessary. Universities need to work harder to find ways to minimize the pedagogical cost of those compromises. It should not be difficult to ensure that the less "celebrated" teachers be excellent teachers, as well, especially in the light of the number of well-trained Ph.D.'s who, in recent years, have not been able to move into full-time teaching positions. (The more difficult task will be to make sure that those Ph.D.'s not be exploited in their roles as coadjutants.)

Nevertheless, it would be disingenuous to underplay the degree to which in the current academic marketplace scholarship has a higher priority than teaching—at least in the matter of faculty salaries and perquisites. Many universities attract outstanding scholars to their faculty with relatively high salaries and promises of reduced teaching responsibilities.

Most humanities faculty would agree that it would be a good idea if distinguished senior researchers could devote some time to the teaching of non-specialist students, inspiring by example and depth of knowledge. Indeed, many senior faculty find that they particularly enjoy such teaching when given the opportunity. Since departments and graduate programs characteristically want them to teach advanced courses, institutions need to establish structures that exert countervailing pressures.

One further point about the relationship between scholarship and teaching needs to be made. While much emphasis is placed on the research activities of faculty, the fact is that only a small portion of faculty do significant publishing. In a survey of recent literature about university teaching (*The New York Review of Books*, February 13, 1986), Andrew Hacker cites the evidence compiled by Martin Finkelstein that "more than half of all professors devote fewer than five hours a week to research, while upward of a third admit to none at all." We cite this fact not to applaud it, but to indicate that if there is a large problem about teaching, it has less to do with faculty commitment to research than tends to be allowed.

It is important to overcome other misconceptions about the attitudes with which scholars approach their classroom work. While it is true that some scholars prefer writing to teaching, most imagine themselves as teachers and take their teaching very seriously. In some rare cases, it might make sense to keep an outstanding researcher from the classroom and let him or her serve the university through significant publications. But Chaucer's description of his Clerk holds in the case of the best faculty everywhere: "Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche." It is necessary to reconsider the dualism, research/teaching, that pervades the criticism of the humanities these days.

In an article written for *The Washington Post* and subsequently reprinted in *The Miami Herald* (June 26, 1988) the President of Georgetown University, Timothy S. Healy, S. J., commented on the "sharp and immemorial debate" that arises in college faculty committees on rank and tenure about "teaching and scholarship—or rather, teaching versus scholarship." This opposition, Father Healy argues forcefully, is "quite simply founded on a false premise. The two activities, teaching and scholarship, are not incompatible, even less opposed." "It is true," he writes, "that the first work of any university is the instruction of undergraduates. It is not true that this teaching bears no relation to research and scholarship. As a matter of fact . . . these two great works stand as cause and effect. All other goods of the university flow from its scholarship, and without it all of them are diminished, indeed suspect."

Above all, Father Healy contends, it is the human element in research and scholarship that contributes most to its inspiriting pedagogical effect. "When a student sees that the professor is the live embodiment of a discipline, when he understands in class or lab the excitement as well as the stress of discovery . . . this can turn his learning upside down, make it live and breathe." Likewise, "scholarship keeps the professor . . . alive," instilling confidence in what he or she is teaching, and rendering the classroom teacher "blessedly unafraid to acknowledge ignorance or even error," since it is from such gaps and questions that new knowledge, and true learning begins.

Arguments like this are made regularly within research universities and often greeted with cynicism because research and scholarship tend to be the primary requirements for promotion and tenure. But departments scrutinize teaching qualifications carefully, frequently

using for evidence not only student evaluations and course syllabi but the reports of faculty observers. The excellent teacher who loses tenure because of weakness in scholarship may well represent a loss to undergraduate teaching. But the divided responsibilities of universities do not entail the kind of fatal dualism of which universities are often accused. It is very possible to find faculty who are both good researchers and good teachers. On the other hand, it is risky to give tenure to faculty who show no promise of strong research on the grounds that their teaching is excellent because without strong research the materials of pedagogy are likely to wear thin.

The two activities of teaching and scholarship are properly a continuum, and one that engages the student in the pursuit as well as in the profession of knowledge, in the desire for learning as well as the facts and theories that such learning has produced.

It is worth noting that the sharp division which once existed between universities and small liberal arts colleges with regard to teaching and scholarship has virtually disappeared. As a result of the decline in the academic job market in the 1970's, liberal arts colleges, which had always prided themselves on the value they placed on teaching, were able to seek in their job applicants not only distinction in teaching but also a quality of publication (or commitment to published scholarship) that had previously been associated with "research universities." At the same time, and motivated by the same market, universities, public and private, began to place renewed attention on the teaching skills of their faculty as well as on their promise of scholarly productivity. In the most widely read professional journals in the humanities today—journals such as *Representations*, *Critical Inquiry*, *PMLA*, and *College English*—as well as in academic conferences, contributors are as likely to be from colleges as from universities. The colleges thus represented have not abandoned their traditional high criteria for teaching (as can readily be seen by the numbers of students who still apply for admission); instead they have taken advantage of a new stage in the development of the profession of the humanities to bring together the twin values of teaching and scholarship that have always been the inextricable materials of the profession—and of the culture it represents.

It is one of the commonplaces of attacks on the humanities that professors do not engage themselves with pedagogical problems or

problems of the curriculum, but rather indulge their own narrow specialties or, even worse, slide into an intellectually flimsy relativism that absolves them of the responsibility to make choices. For anyone within the profession who lives with the plethora of curriculum committees, university reports and surveys, master plans, and the heated internal debates of faculty meetings such a claim is ridiculous. Journals like *College English*, *The History Teacher*, and the *ADE Bulletin* are devoted to discussions of pedagogy and curriculum. Such activities are central to academic life, stimulating and frustrating by turns, but they are evidence of the general engagement of faculty in the main function of the university—education.

RESPONSIBILITY

In addressing the issues of teaching, core curriculum, and the relation between the humanities and "values," we have in this report largely responded to the arguments that the humanities have in the years since the 1960's conspicuously failed in fulfilling their responsibility both to the academy and to society. In a sense, this entire report addresses the question of the nature of these responsibilities and the evidences that the humanities are, for the most part, fulfilling them.

The humanities, to summarize, continue:

1) to take with the utmost seriousness their responsibilities to the past: to the excavation of its human treasures, and to their study and safekeeping. But in addition, the humanities continue to expand our sense of the past and to include those who have hitherto remained on the margins of history: the powerless, the illiterate, the dispossessed.

2) to encourage the free discussion of human values, particularly to expose and analyze those values that lie hidden beneath the surfaces of language and of art.

3) to protect and celebrate languages—verbal or visual, in poems or paintings, novels or films, but also in non-fictional writing or in artifacts. But protection and celebration do not mean inflexible affirmation of past structures; rather they entail a rigorous self-consciousness about the structure and operations of languages as they transform through history.

4) to investigate the way meaning is created, how we determine what is true or false, how we interpret and define "reality."

5) to encourage and investigate the uses of the imagination in its creation of alternative worlds through language and the arts.

The humanities, that is to say, are to remind us of, and to act as witnesses for, the American belief in a profound connection between education and democracy, between an alert mind and the exercise of civic virtue. The report of the Commission on the Humanities—*The Humanities in American Life*—argued that "Democracy rests on the principle of enlightened self-rule by the entire citizenry . . . Our republic stands on a belief that educated citizens will participate effectively in decisions concerning the whole community. Humanistic education helps prepare individuals for this civic activity."

This is not an argument for the return to a traditionally conceived humanities and curriculum, but the strongest possible case for the kinds of critical questioning that characterize the humanities at their best at the present time. Responsible humanistic thought, no matter how critical or skeptical it might be, no matter how insistently it analyzes and questions the assumptions that govern even our most ordinary discourse, helps to create the freeing conditions of democracy.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTERS

Of all the recent developments in the humanities, the one that answers most directly to negative criticisms and most fully expresses the range and importance of the humanities is the proliferation of interdisciplinary humanities centers. There is, to this point, no complete directory to such centers, but the new humanities center at the University of California, Irvine, has compiled a list of close to 300 throughout the country. In such centers, the faculty find the contexts which allow them to move beyond the constraints of narrowly conceived specialization: talking across disciplines forces a re-examination of the assumptions that govern their thought, and may threaten to close their discourse to all but other specialists. Most important, such interdisciplinary conversation brings fresh perspectives to bear on issues of deep concern to society.

Despite the widespread charge that the humanities have lost faith

in themselves, these centers are devoted to taking the humanities seriously as disciplines that formulate, articulate, and criticize our culture's ideals and practices. The centers are manifestations of a strong faith by universities—often demonstrated through substantial investments—in the importance and vitality of the humanities, and are, in part, expressions of a widespread commitment to continuing study of the very traditions critics claim are being abandoned. But that commitment is combined with an understanding of the need for wider perspectives—historical, social, philosophical, aesthetic—on those traditions.

Much of what most matters in modern thought challenges claims to universality and subverts traditional assumptions of authority; and those challenges—from science (relativity and quantum theory, for example), from psychoanalysis, from philosophy, from cultural anthropology, from critical theory—cannot be ignored by way of a simple return to tradition, for they significantly alter the way we can conceptualize "tradition." Nor is the challenge to the humanities represented by the growth of these interdisciplinary centers a return to an old core or an attempt to devise a new one along interdisciplinary lines. Rather, such centers are working to provide a context that will allow the best contemporary thinking to be brought to bear on classic texts and issues, on questions about centrality, universality, and authority: such thinking has led to challenges to strictly disciplinary study and to many attempts throughout the nation to construct satisfying and reasonable curricular cores.

The centers are, of course, very different from each other in their activities and objectives, but they tend to share the view that the humanities have an important role to play, not only in university curricula and research, but in the life of society. They aim to increase significant activity in the humanities, to encourage excellence in research, criticism, and teaching. With wide variations in attitudes, all of these centers tend to agree in seeking to overcome the limits of specialization and to contribute to new ways of thinking about the major cultural issues raised by literature, history, philosophy, and art. Far from retreating from the great moral and social issues of our time, as has often been charged, the humanities, partly through the work of the humanities centers, are responding directly to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of our recommendations for the immediate future do not appear markedly different from many of the recommendations made by the most severe critics of the humanities. The difference depends in great measure on our confidence—justified, we believe, by the evidence—in the present condition of the humanities, in their vitality, critical seriousness, and commitment to democratic education. Most obviously, our difference from critics of the humanities comes in a rejection of the notion that the way forward is the way back. One cannot proceed, in the humanities, by looking to past curricula, past conceptions of value and meaning, to provide the models that will allow us to meet the current crises with which the humanities are now most profoundly concerned. Part of our responsibility is, in fact, to learn to understand those models and the reasons for their failure. Nor can we proceed, given the evidence of the astonishing scholarship and critical and theoretical sophistication of many of our current professors of the humanities, by assuming that current problems are a consequence of our having fallen away from the great ideals of the humanities that prevailed before the 1960's. Gerald Graff has put the point well in his detailed and scholarly history of the profession of English: "Whatever the sins of recent theory, those who blame the problems of the humanities on them—and on other post-1960 developments—only illustrate their own pet maxim that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it. The solutions they propose—a return to a great tradition with no investigation of why that tradition has come to be questioned—figures only to send us yet one more time around what we will see has been an oft-repeated cycle." The quality of teaching has surely not declined; the engagement with the major issues of ethics and aesthetics has certainly not diminished. What is required is the determination to risk the difficulties that follow from profound questioning.

Higher education as it is presently structured in the United States is obviously far from perfect, the complicated product of many tradeoffs in a pluralistic, democratic society. But we believe that there are many virtues in the present system, and the following recommendations suggest ways to build fruitfully on our existing areas of genuine excellence:

- We urge that faculty discussion of humanities curricula be made

a high priority not only, and obviously, within humanities departments, but within colleges and universities as whole institutions. Such discussion is important in engaging faculty members in a process of defining the aims of the institution and the various disciplines which organize its schools and departments.

- We urge institutions to require work in the humanities; but that work should be drawn—with the qualifications noted below—from what their faculty has been most successful teaching. A national core curriculum or national list of books would be not only a recipe for unimaginative teaching, but a restriction of fundamental intellectual liberties. Colleges and universities should build, rather, on courses offered by their faculty that prove particularly effective and inspiring.

- We urge that humanities programs continue to teach the great works of the traditional canon in relation to historical scholarship and critical theory. In addition, experiments with the canon should be the norm, not the exception, and texts representing traditionally marginal voices or other national contexts should always be taught, and for these reasons: first, because our students are not themselves drawn from a single homogeneous culture; second, because the nation is increasingly involved in cultural and business exchanges with other nations; third, because one of the humanities' most fundamental responsibilities is to expose and question the aesthetic, moral, cultural, and epistemological assumptions which govern our behavior and our society.

- We urge that where practicable humanities departments make as a focus of study the question of why and how the discipline has been constituted and authorized. Faculty should find ways of communicating the stakes and the issues to students so that they will gain a better understanding of the purposes of education in the humanities, the different visions that animate work in these fields, and the questions that their teachers regard as particularly important and controversial.

- We urge that colleges and universities insure that every student —major or non-major—have a chance to take humanities courses that are not large, impersonal lecture courses but that meet in small sections where there is ample opportunity for discussion and for detailed consideration of each student's writing. These courses should be taught, wherever possible, by full-time faculty members with adequate experience or training in teaching. Bearing in mind the

importance of this sort of teaching, institutions should provide more faculty positions to insure that it is done well.

- We urge universities to develop policies that insure that distinguished faculty teach significant numbers of undergraduates.

- We urge that colleges and universities offer their faculty members opportunities for interdisciplinary research—to broaden their interests and to enliven their specialized pursuits—and for interdisciplinary teaching, whether in General Education programs aimed at non-specialists, in interdisciplinary programs or centers, or in collaboration with other colleagues. The most exciting recent developments in the humanities emphasize that thought does not follow traditional departmental divisions, and the most fruitful lines of thinking often traverse previous boundaries. Colleges and universities must insure that their structures are sufficiently flexible to profit from new teaching and research opportunities.

APPENDIX

Further Details on Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollments

The Association of Departments of English invited attendees at its 1988 summer seminars to indicate the number of English majors in their departments in the 1985–86, 1986–87, and 1987–88 academic years. To date, the Association has received responses from 66 departments, 55 of whom report increases, 4 of whom report decreases, and 7 of whom report no change or fluctuation.

On the whole, history has been much slower in regaining its popularity as a major than have the literary disciplines. There was, indeed, as critics of the humanities have claimed, a radical drop in history degrees awarded between 1973 and 1984. As reported in *Perspectives*, the newsletter of the American Historical Association (February, 1988), the decline from 1973 was steep and continuing until 1984. In 1985–86, however, evidence of a turnaround began to appear. Undergraduate degrees increased from 16,048 to 16,415, Master's degrees from 1921 to 1959, Doctorates from 543 to 563. History has suffered the greatest decline of all the humanities during this period—53.7% as compared to an overall decline in humanities degrees of 36%, and the indications that it is now beginning to grow again are still relatively faint compared to what has been happening in English. Nevertheless, as *Perspectives* reports, "We have good reason to be optimistic about the health of the history discipline. While full recovery remains a distant goal, the data from the National Research Council and the Department of Education testify to a nascent revival."

There are, however, many examples of strong growth in humanities enrollments throughout the country in recent years. Here are a few examples. Texas A&M, for example, indicates that between 1982 and 1987 the number of majors in humanities departments went from 600 to 1,575, an increase of over 250%. While this enormous increase partly reflects an increase in University enrollment of 8.2%, the growth of the humanities far outpaces the growth of the College. Dean Janis Stout reports that the humanities as a whole grew by 58.4% throughout the College. At SUNY–Stony Brook, which reports an overall decline in all arts and sciences enrollments during the period 1980–87 (indicating, again, that the humanities are not peculiarly weak—even in relation to the sciences—but that business and economics courses consume a large proportion of all enrollments), the humanities and foreign languages actually report a small increase in FTE workload. The University of California, Irvine, reports steady growth in most humanities departments since 1983.

English department enrollments went from 1,273 to 1,930; history from 1,614 to 2,180; philosophy from 1,142 to 1,724. Growth in foreign languages was more erratic. These increases —except for the foreign languages— were higher than the increase in overall enrollment at Irvine. The number of majors in English went up over 145% in that time, in history about 50%, in philosophy just under 80%, and in French 90%. The English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, reports increases both in numbers and in quality of students. Majors have gone from a low of 300 in 1981–82 to 650 in 1987–88. The University of Oregon reports substantial increases in humanities majors between 1985 and 1987, as for example, English 349 to 454 and history 189 to 264. Overall, humanities majors in Oregon went from 2,587 to 3,109 in those three years. At the University of Michigan, the percentage of English majors has doubled in the last five years.

At the graduate level, recovery from decline has been slower, but the pattern is apparently similar to that we have been discovering in undergraduate enrollments. According to statistics published by the NRC, there was a steep decline in humanities degrees from 1977 to about 1982. After that there has been little significant change. There has, however, been a small increase in humanities doctorates awarded in 1986 (from 3,428 in 1985 to 3,461). This, combined with the stability from 1983 (3,946 degrees awarded), does suggest that the decline has ended. It also seems to reflect the leveling out of the job market in academia. Obviously, graduate degrees are particularly sensitive to the number of jobs available in colleges and universities; and as more become available, the number of graduate degrees in the humanities is certain to grow.

What is particularly interesting, given our analysis of the statistics about undergraduates at Stanford, is that while the total number of graduate degrees in all fields stayed about the same from 1977 to 1986 (31,716 to 31,770), the only fields that showed growth were the physical sciences (4,379 to 4,808), engineering (2,643 to 3,376), life sciences (4,920 to 5,720), and "professional fields" (1,660 to 1,936). Here again, students were turning to more obviously "practical" disciplines. Moreover, while the social sciences showed an overall decline, the undergraduate level economics (including econometric) grew. Another fact worthy of lengthy analysis (although there is no room for that here) is that while in 1977 men constituted 64% of the humanities doctorates, in 1986 women were drawing closer to parity: men 55%, women 45%.

One further point relating to these statistics: obviously, regardless of the various debates about the quality of humanities instruction, the health of the humanities at the graduate level is partly dependent on the availability of financial support, and as the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance reports, there has been a "demonstrable decrease" in that support.

The development of Mellon Foundation grants beginning in 1983–84 has been one of the few genuinely encouraging signs of support for the humanities during this period when the orientation of education generally has been so distinctly toward the pragmatic. More such grants would almost certainly lead to increased numbers of high quality doctorate degrees in the humanities. Given the scarcity of support and the general economic climate of the country, it is remarkable that graduate enrollments have stayed as strong as they are, and that the humanities have managed to maintain their importance in the university curriculum.

NOTES

1 It is, of course, an easy and sometimes a fair target. In her recent address to the American Council of Learned Societies (published in the ACLS *Newsletter*, Winter, 1988), Lynne Cheney typically locates a particularly egregious example. Of course, taken out of context, it will appear much worse than when the context is understood, but there is no doubt that her hostility to willful obscurantism and jargon is justified and widely shared, even by many within the profession, and certainly by the writers of this report. The problem is to identify how much of the impenetrable jargon is merely self-indulgent and fuzzy-minded, how much a necessity of complex argument. The problem cannot be addressed by locating a few bad examples and taking them as representative, implying that this is the sort of writing sanctioned by the most serious scholars in the humanities.

2 We find that in 1969–70 history and English had the largest enrollment of majors and took respectively 11.1 and 11.0 percent of all majors in the School of Humanities and Sciences. In 1974–75, economics, which did not rank among the top four in 1969–70, was the third largest, and English had fallen from the top four. History, its majors down by close to 40%, had fallen to fourth. In 1979–80, economics became the largest major in the school, registering 11.1% of all majors. From then on, economics majors increased to a high in 1984–85 of 543, or 16.9% of all majors in the school, and economics remained the most popular major. During that time, both history and English dropped from the top four (in 1979–80) and then English returned to reach the level of third, but with only 6.6% of enrollments in 1986–87. But there is another striking fact that strict attention solely to humanities enrollments will not reveal. Overall social science majors also declined seriously during the period of humanities decline, and in spite of the fact that one of the social science disciplines, economics, gained great strength. Thus, even when economics had 16.9% of all majors, the social sciences had only 46.4%, 11.2% lower than they had in 1969–70, when economics was not even among the top four departments.

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